

Smooth Otter *Lutrogale perspicillata* at Byram, Penang State, Peninsular Malaysia

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Identity of subject: Smooth Otter, *Lutrogale perspicillata* (Mammalia: Carnivora: Mustelidae)

Observers: Nick Baker, Graeme Guy.

Photographs by: Nick Baker.

Subject identified by: Nick Baker.

Location: Byram, Penang State, Peninsular Malaysia (Lat 5° 12.40'N Long 100° 25.95'E).

Elevation : Sea-level.

Habitat: Modified wetlands including remnant mangrove along the coast, linear freshwater drainage channels and freshwater marsh with dense vegetation.

Date and time: 13 June 2016, 09:45 to 11:00 hrs.

Description of record: A lone, adult male was observed for 75 minutes as it explored a 1.5 km section of a linear, freshwater body which runs parallel to a bund at the edge of mangrove habitat. It emerged occasionally onto the bund, where it was observed resting briefly in the sun, rolling in dried earth (Fig 1.), defecating and urinating, and encountering a fully grown Malayan Water Monitor *Varanus salvator* (which it did not approach closely) (Fig. 2). Whilst in the water it was clearly hunting for food, and it finally caught and consumed a fish at 10:55 hrs (Fig. 3.).

A separate family group of at least six were briefly spotted at 11:10 hrs at the edge of a freshwater marsh which extends beyond the inland margin of the same linear body of water. An adult of the group was seen to stand erect (Fig. 4.), and alarm calls were heard before the group retreated into the dense vegetation of the marsh.



Fig. 1.

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Fig. 2.

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Fig. 3.

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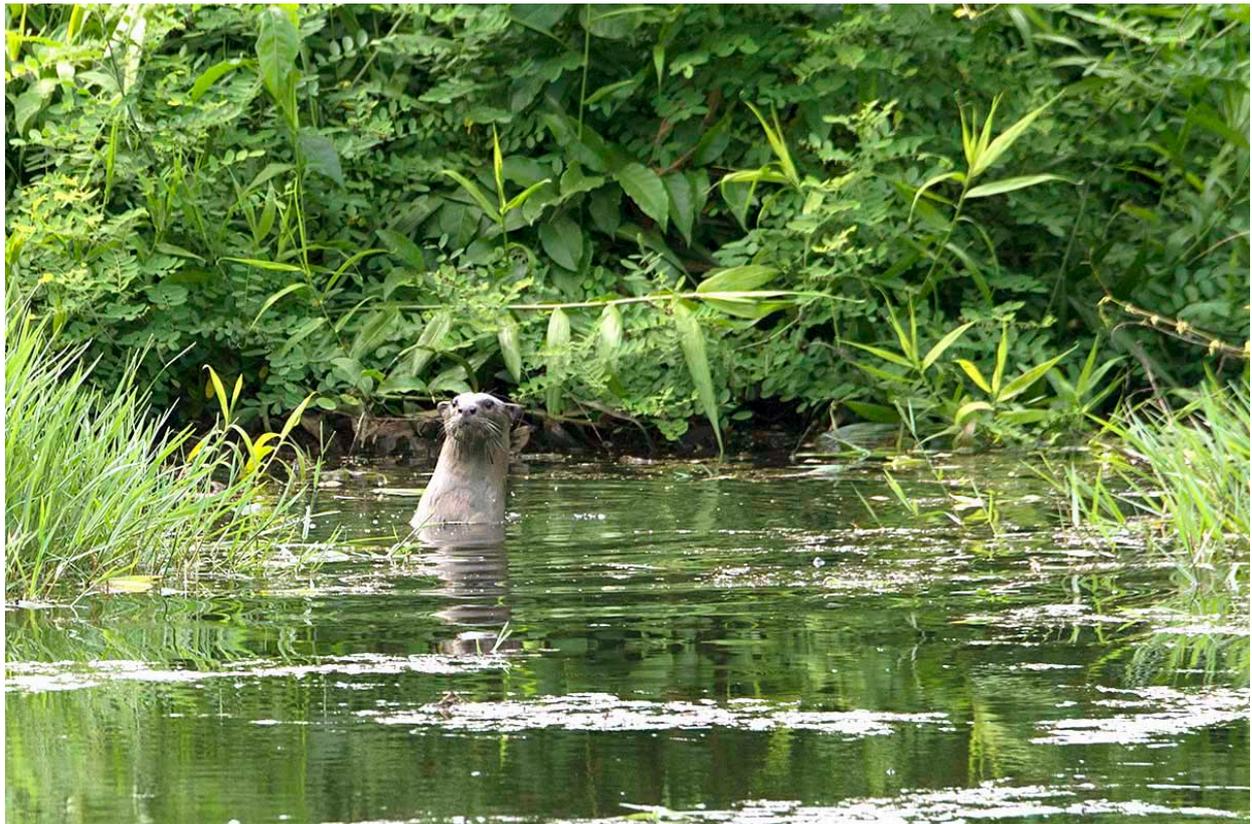


Fig. 4.

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Remarks : The Smooth Otter *Lutrogale perspicillata* can be sighted in coastal regions of Penang State in northern Peninsular Malaysia, including the island of Pulau Pinang. It is an adaptable species, and can survive in highly modified wetlands such as those that exist at Byram. The second author has observed the species making use of a holt beneath a coastal bund constructed of large rocks, in the northeast of Pulau Pinang.

In 2012, the second author made weekly visits to Byram during the first six months of the year, and documented groups of Smooth Otter (exact numbers uncertain) on four occasions between 16th February and 30th May, between 07:00 and 11:00 hrs. A lone otter was also observed on 10th March 2012.

The Smooth Otter occurs throughout most of mainland Southeast Asia and its range extends westwards into India, northwards into southern China and southwards into Sumatra and Java (Francis, 2008). Penang State thus lies in the heart of the eastern part of its range.

References:

Francis, C. M. (2008). *A Field Guide to the Mammals of South-East Asia*. New Holland Publishers (UK) Ltd. 392 pp.